



Aspira's
Alumni Christmas Dance

Quality Inn
December 16, 1989

PROGRAM

8:00 - 9:00 PM Reception

9:00 - 9:30 PM Dance

9:30 - 10:00 PM Welcome

Elsa Nuñez-Wormack, Chairperson
ASPIRA Board of Directors

The Occasion: Celebrating Alumni Achievements

Margaret Rosario-Rivera, Member
ASPIRA Board of Directors

Severiano Lisboa, 1968

Carmelo Colon, 1970

Maria Soto-Greene, 1971

Nellie Pou, 1974

Ramonita Santiago, 1975

Closing Remarks

Hilda Rosario, Executive Director
ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey

10:00 - 2:00 AM Dance



Severiano Lisboa



Carmelo Colon



Maria Soto-Greene



Nellie Pou



Ramonita Santiago

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey feels very proud of its Alumni, and is honored by their accomplishments. Our Alumni are the best evidence of everything we claim to be; their success is our best source of strength to continue striving on behalf of our mission.

During their high school years, the Alumni we highlight tonight were just like the youngsters who still become Aspirantes and undergo the "ASPIRA Process." The personal stories of these Alumni encompass our very first organizational experiences. Nonetheless, these stories are very similar to the anecdotes which our Counselors regularly bring into the office in 1989.

I am grateful to this group of Alumni for their willingness to be highlighted tonight. They have shared with our staff many memories which we treasure, as well as words of wisdom, which I am now pleased to share with you.

May I take this opportunity to express my very best wishes to all for the Christmas Holidays and the New Year.

Hilda Rosario
Hilda Rosario

SEVERIANO LISBOA (1968)

Severiano grew up in Brooklyn, New York, graduating in 1968 from the Franklin K. Lane High School. He became an Aspirante in ASPIRA of Borough Hall. Obtaining his B.A. at Brooklyn College in 1972, he went on to pursue a Juris Doctor degree at Rutgers University, Newark. His degree was conferred in 1976.

In his professional life, Severiano has worked at both the public and private sectors. After four years of work as an attorney for Hudson County Legal Services, he went into private practice with Fuentes & Velazquez. Afterwards, he accepted an appointment as Presiding Judge of the Municipal Court, a position he held for eight years. In 1989 he became the first Puerto Rican to be appointed Superior Court Judge in Hudson County.

Judge Lisboa has received many distinctions and awards for excellence and service to the community. He has served as President of the Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey, Member of the Supreme Court of New Jersey's Task Force on Minority Concerns, Vice-Chair of the Hudson Hamilton Council of Boy Scouts of America, and in the Puerto Rican Association for Community Organizations. He received an Eagle Scout Award when he was in high school. Other awards include a Distinguished Alumni Award from Brooklyn College, a Community Service Award from the NNACP-Hoboken, as well as from the Puerto Rican Parade of Jersey City.

Regarding his days as an Aspirante, Severiano vividly remembers his first contact: "I saw this young man and a young lady, both very well-dressed. The young man had a tie. It was the first time I saw Puerto Rican college students. They were trying to sell us ASPIRA, talking about motivation and cultural identity. I liked the way they were groomed... my impression was very positive. And I thought: 'Gee, I want to be like them. I'm going to check that out. They seem to be having a good time in college.'" From then on, it was a matter of completing college applications and financial aid forms, without which, said Severiano, "it would have been impossible to consider college an option. The counselors walked me through the whole process." As an Aspirante, he became involved in poetry classes and in a dance troupe, activities which he remembers as important in the development of his cultural awareness.

Judge Lisboa's words of advice to our youth? "You really have to want to be somebody if you want to be successful."

CARMELO COLON (1970)

Carmelo grew up in Newark's Columbus Home Projects. He graduated from Essex Catholic High School in 1970. At that time there was only one ASPIRA Club in New Jersey, the Pitirre ASPIRA Club, in which Carmelo participated. He entered Livingston College and pursued a B.A. (1974) in which he combined Community Development, Social Services and Puerto Rican Studies. In 1969-70 Carmelo was elected President of the Pitirre Club, and in his first year of college he became the first President of the ASPIRA Club Federation of New Jersey.

Upon college graduation Carmelo worked several years as a writer for a consumer agency, and went on to Columbia University to obtain a Master's in Psychiatric Social Work (1978). He thus became one of the few Hispanic psychotherapists practicing in the city of Newark. In 1980 he joined the Community Mental Health Center of the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey, where he has worked since. At present he is a Mental Health Clinician, and Coordinator of the Psychogenic Impotence Program.

Community service endeavors in Carmelo's life have included membership in the Puerto Rican Health Organization of New Jersey and in the Long Range Planning Board of Columbus Hospital. He prepared the first directory of Hispanic health practitioners in the state of New Jersey and the first report which analyzed the sensitivity of hospitals to Hispanic issues. Carmelo is also a photographer who has documented many activities of the Puerto Rican community in Newark: many of ASPIRA's early photographs are owed to him.

About his ASPIRA experience, Carmelo remembers: "ASPIRA was a very important influence in my life. It was the first Newark organization that recognized the role of Puerto Rican youth in the community, encouraging us to aim for the highest college placement, to do the very best. It truly became the backbone of support of our high school life. ASPIRA really pushed. Even when we were not ready, it pushed. We had to assume the reins of leadership, do something. It was a challenge that could not be refused."

Carmelo offers the following message to our youth: "Continue school despite any and all obstacles, since education is a potent weapon to be used on behalf of the community, and one that can never be taken away."

MARIA SOTO-GREEN (1971)

Maria grew up in Hoboken, Hudson City, graduating from Hoboken High School in 1971. When she was a senior, ASPIRA created its first program at her high school. Maria attended Douglas College, New Brunswick, obtaining a B.S. in Medical Technology in 1975. In 1980 she became an M.D., graduating from the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ).

Dr. Soto-Greene works as Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine at UMDNJ. Among her distinctions, she has received the Ingrid Brekke Nelson Award for Excellence as a Student in Medical Technology; the Ciba-Geigy Community Service Award and the Foster F. Burnett, M.D. Memorial Award for Academic Excellence (UMDNJ).

Maria is a member of the United Puerto Rican Council and the American Women Civic Alliance, both in Passaic. At UMDNJ she is active in both the regular and the minority Student Affairs committees.

Reminiscing about her days as an Aspirante, she expressed: "ASPIRA played an integral part of my life. When its counselors first came to Hoboken, they encouraged me to request college admission and helped me to complete all sorts of application forms. I was to become a female first generation college student, and I faced special obstacles. The counselors helped me to convince my mother to visit Douglass, once I decided that I wanted to go there. But that was not all. When I visited the central office with my resume, seeking help to obtain work after my B.S., Grisel Ubarri told me in no uncertain terms that I should apply to medical school. It was a career that I had never contemplated. If I became a physician and a role model, I owe it to ASPIRA. Its perseverance and interest in my career development was crucial."

Maria would like to share the following thought with youngsters now in school: "With hard work and determination the sky truly is the only limit. I was fortunate to have participated in an organization such as ASPIRA, which is dedicated to helping the Puerto Rican youth achieve their dreams. Don't allow an opportunity like this to slip away."

NELLIE POU (1974)

Nellie grew up in Paterson, attending John F. Kennedy High School, from which she graduated in 1974. During her junior and senior years as an Aspirante she served as Vice President of her school's ASPIRA Club. Admitted to Kean College, she pursued a B.A. in Sociology and took specialized courses in Municipal Financing at Rutgers University.

Ms. Pou has worked in public administration at the county and city levels over the past fourteen years. At present, she is Director of the Department of Human Resources in Paterson, a position appointed by the Mayor. Upon her appointment, Nellie became the first and only Hispanic ever appointed to a department directorship in Paterson, and the highest ranking Hispanic official in the city.

Her volunteer community service activities include being President of the Paterson Community Civic Organization. Among the awards she has received, she has been selected Distinguished Community Leader by Fuerzas Hispanas. Also, the Work After School Program, a project developed and implemented by Nellie while she worked in the Private Industry Council, was honored with a Presidential Summer Jobs Award.

Nellie's days as an Aspirante bring "nothing but wonderful memories", she stated. The role model provided by her counselor, Rosa Vizcarrondo, is fondly remembered. Further, Ms. Pou recalls, "as a young girl, it was important to me to be involved with an organization that would help me understand my roots, my heritage. ASPIRA became many things to me. It was recreational, and got us to meet other students from other schools. Each group's desire to see its Club work required constant involvement. We were very proud of our Club. . . it became like a second home. And, of course, it was through the efforts of ASPIRA that I was able to go to college. Career Days were specially useful, as was the assistance we obtained in correctly completing application forms."

Addressing our youth with words of advice, Nellie would like to stress the importance of "clearly seeing through, in the inner self, what it is that we want to do," and of "going into that inner self to bring out the necessary strength to do everything we can to achieve what we want."

RAMONITA SANTIAGO (1975)

Ramonita grew up in Jersey City. She attended James J. Ferris High School, where she became an Aspirante. She completed high school in three years, graduating in 1975 at age sixteen. In 1979 she obtained a B.A. in Home Economics at Montclair State College.

Upon college graduation, Ms. Santiago worked as Assistant to the Dean at Cook College. After holding diverse positions at this institution, in 1986 she became Assistant Dean, which made her one of the youngest Assistant Deans at Rutgers University. In 1989 she joined the Bell Communications Research Corporate Center as Associate Manager of the Office of University Relations. She is also a graduate student at Rutgers School of Social Work.

Ramonita has been quite active in diverse community public service endeavors. She collaborates with the YWCA and United Way of Central Jersey, and is a member of the New Jersey State Board of Public Welfare and the New Jersey Hispanic Women's Task Force. Her community service activities have earned her the following awards and distinctions: Outstanding Contribution to the Hispanic Rutgers Community; Outstanding Contribution to Students of Color, Douglass College; Outstanding Woman of America; Outstanding Alumnus, Statewide Educational Opportunity Fund; Outstanding Contribution to the Hispanic Community, Puerto Rican Day Parade; and an appointment to the Hispanic Women's Leadership Institute.

Asked to think back about her experience as an Aspirante, Ramonita stated: "ASPIRA really shaped and molded my leadership capabilities. I was so young, and didn't quite know where I was going. In the ASPIRA Club I learned leadership skills, and developed a deep cultural and political awareness of my community. I remember how, at the Retreats, I learned to be vocal and outspoken in camaraderie. As a result, during my first year of college I became Secretary to the Latin American Students Organization, and by my fourth year I was its Vice President."

Co-founder of Middlesex County's Friends of ASPIRA, Ms. Santiago advises Aspirantes to always bear in mind what has become her motto: "There is never anything too impossible to accomplish."

ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey

Hilda Rosario,
Executive Director

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